

Message Text

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TOSEC 419 HAMILTON FOR SISCO

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TAGS: OVIP (KISSINGER)

SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT OSWALD JOHNSTON FRONT PAGE BYLINER THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, WASHINGTON STAR, HEADLINED "US PREPARING SHIFT IN PALESTINE STANCE".
2. "TODAY IS A HISTORIC TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE PARTICULARLY AND THE ARAB NATION IN GENERAL" -- YASSIR ARAFAT IN A STATEMENT AT RABAT MOROCCO.
3. "OUR POSITION HAS NOT CHANGED" -- STATEMENT DEPARTMENT POLICY STATEMENT ISSUED AT HENRY A. KISSINGER'S DIRECTION IN WASHINGTON AND ABOARD AIR FORCE TWO, EN ROUTE FROM NEW DELHI TO DACCA, BANGLADESH.
4. DESPITE FORMAL DISCLAIMERS, SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY

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A. KISSINGER AND HIS TOP MIDDLE EAST ADVISERS ARE CARE-

FULLY PREPARING THE WAY FOR A MAJOR CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY
TOWARD THE ONCE-DISDAINED PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION.

5. THE OPENING TO A NEW POLICY EMERGED YESTERDAY IN AN
ARTFULLY WORDED STATEMENT PREPARED AT KISSINGER'S DIRECTION
ABOARD HIS TRAVELING FOREIGN POLICY OFFICE AND ISSUED SOME
12 HOURS LATER IN WASHINGTON. IN KEEPING WITH OTHER HINTS

IN MAJOR POLICY SHIFTS WITHIN RECENT YEARS, IT ROUNDLY
ASSERTED THAT NOTHING HAD CHANGED, BUT THEN LAID THE
GROUNDWORK FOR FUTURE U.S. ACCEPTANCE OF A PLO ROLE IN
A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT.

6. THE STATEMENT WAS IN SOME RESPECTS A RUSH JOB,
DRAFTED AND ISSUED BEFORE POLICY ANALYSTS HERE WERE EVEN
HALF DONE WITH THE TASK OF SIFTING THROUGH INTELLIGENCE
REPORTS FROM THE JUST FINISHED ARAB SUMMIT AT RABAT. AT
THAT MEETING, ARAB LEADERS UNANIMOUSLY CONFERRED ON THE
PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION FOR THE FIRST TIME THE DIGNITY
OF A GOVERNMENT IN EXILE AND ASSIGNED IT A KEY ROLE IN
THE PEACE TALKS.

7. MANY WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS HERE, UNDER PRESSURE TO
GET UP POSITION PAPERS ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF RABAT,
WERE UNAWARE LATE YESTERDAY THAT A POLICY STATEMENT
HAD ALREADY BEEN ISSUED. THAT LAPSE WAS MOSTLY ATTRI-
BUTED TO THE NEW SECRECY RULES KISSINGER'S AIDES HAVE
CLAMPED ON CABLE DISTRIBUTION IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT
AFTER A FEW UNFLATTERING PRESS LEAKS IN RECENT MONTHS.

8. BUT IT WAS ALSO ATTRIBUTED TO THE UNEXPECTED POLICY
FALLOUT FROM RABAT, WHICH ANALYSTS ARE PRIVATELY
ASSESSING AS THE MOST IMPORTANT INTER-ARAB DEVELOPMENT
SINCE THE KHARTOUM SUMMIT IN 1967 FORGED A UNIFIED ARAB
POSTURE OF DEFIANCE FROM THE DISASTER OF THE SIX DAY
WAR.

9. ON THE POLICYMAKING LEVEL, OFFICIALS ARE STILL ALMOST
COMPLETELY IN THE DARK ABOUT THE BEHIND-THE-SCENES
MANEUVERING AT RABAT THAT INDUCED JORDAN'S KING HUSSEIN
TO ABDICATE AUTHORITY OVER THE ISRAELI-OCCUPIED WEST BANK
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OF HIS KINGDOM TO HIS FORMER ARCH-ENEMIES IN THE PLO, IF
ISRAEL WITHDRAWS.

10. UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, NO U.S. POLICY
STATEMENT WOULD HAVE BEEN ISSUED UNTIL THAT QUESTION HAD
BEEN RESOLVED. THE NEW ROLE OF THE PLO OBVIOUSLY JEOPAR-
DIZES U.S. HOPES FOR A PIECEMEAL NEGOTIATING PATTERN
BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARAB STATES, WITH ISRAELI LEADERS

TALKING FIRST WITH HUSSEIN ABOUT TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS ON THE WEST BANK, AND LATER WITH EGYPT OVER FURTHER TROOP WITHDRAWALS IN THE SINAI.

11. BUT THE ENORMITY OF THE EVENT FORCED EVERYBODY'S HAND. IN ISRAEL, WHERE AN ECONOMIC SLUMP HAS COMBINED WITH RISING ARAB FORTUNES TO PRODUCE A POLITICAL SHIFT TO THE RIGHT, GOVERNMENT LEADERS ISSUED THE EXPECTED REFUSAL

TO NEGOTIATE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WITH THE "TERRORISTS" AND "SABOTEURS" OF THE PLO. PREDICTIONS OF A WAR BY NEXT SPRING MULTIPLIED.

12. IN WASHINGTON, EVEN WITHOUT THE STUDY OF THE POLICY EXPERTS IN HAND, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT A MAJOR NEW ELEMENT HAD BEEN INJECTED INTO THE MIDDLE EAST EQUATION.

13. AT THE WHITE HOUSE TUESDAY MORNING, WHERE PRESIDENT FORD WAS PREPARING AN "IMPROMPTU" NEWS CONFERENCE, NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AIDES, STILL TRYING TO DIGEST THE NEWS FROM RABAT, WERE ORDERED TO PREPARE A STATEMENT FOR FORD IF ASKED ABOUT THE ARAB SUMMIT.

14. "THE DECISION BY THE ARAB NATIONS TO TURN OVER THE NEGOTIATING FOR THE WEST BANK TO THE PLO MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE AN IMPACT ON OUR ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST," READ THE PRESIDENT'S DELIBERATELY INNOCUOUS PRESS GUIDANCE FOR HIS NEWS CONFERENCE. FORD, MORE OR LESS, SAID JUST THAT.

15. BUT THEN HE WENT ON, IN HIS OWN WORDS: "WE OF COURSE FEEL THAT THERE MUST BE MOVEMENT TOWARD SETTLEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT ON THE ONE HAND, BETWEEN ISRAEL AND JORDAN OR THE PLO ON THE OTHER..."
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16. IT WAS POTENTIALLY A SERIOUS MISSTATEMENT, EQUATING THE PLO WITH HUSSEIN'S GOVERNMENT AND APPARENTLY URGING ISRAEL TO DEAL WITH IT. BUT NO REPORTERS QUERIED IT, AND WHITE HOUSE AIDES NEGLECTED TO ALTER IT BEFORE IT HAD BEEN ENSHRINED IN AN OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL WORDS.

17. FROM THAT MOMENT, THE ADMINISTRATION WAS TRAPPED IN A NEW POSITION.

18. BECAUSE OF THE DELICACY OF CURRENT U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB STATES, A FLAT DENIAL THAT THE UNITED STATES CONSIDERED THE PLO THE NEGOTIATING EQUAL OF JORDAN MIGHT HAVE TORPEDOED KISSINGER'S REMAINING CHANCES OF

KEEPING ANY PEACE TALKS ALIVE.

19. YET TO ALLOW FORD'S STATEMENT TO STAND UNMODIFIED WOULD HAVE SIGNALLED A MAJOR DEPARTURE: THAT THE UNITED STATES ACCEPTS RABAT AND RECOGNIZES THE PLO AS REPRESENTING A SOVEREIGN NATION CAPABLE OF NEGOTIATING A PEACE AGREEMENT.

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20. BY COINCIDENCE, ISRAELI AMBASSADOR SIMCHA BINITZ WAS SCHEDULED TUESDAY AFTERNOON TO MEET WITH UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE JOSEPH J. SISCO, AND HE IS KNOWN TO HAVE ASKED FOR AN EXPLANATION OF FORD'S REMARK. ISRAELI SOURCES REFUSE TO DISCUSS THEIR CONVERSATION, BUT IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT BINITZ WAS ADVISED THAT FORD MISSPOKE AND WAS ASSURED THAT A CLARIFYING STATEMENT WOULD BE PUBLISHED LATER.

21. THE STATEMENT WAS ISSUED LATE TUESDAY NIGHT FROM THE KISSINGER PARTY. WHILE ITS OPENING ASSURANCE THAT THE U.S. "POSITION HAS NOT CHANGED" HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED BY THE ISRAELI FOREIGN OFFICE, ITS REAL IMPORT CANNOT HAVE BEEN TAKEN WITH MUCH COMFORT IN JERUSALEM.

22. THE STATEMENT MADE NO DIRECT REFERENCE TO THE PLO, OR TO FORD'S INADVERTENT PROMOTION OF THE ORGANIZATION
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TO NATIONHOOD. IN ITS OPERATIVE SECTION THE STATEMENT REASSERTED KISSINGER'S "GRADUALIST" POLICY -- BUT DID SO PROVOCATIVELY IN THE PAST TENSE: "IT HAS BEEN OUR JUDGMENT THAT STEP-BY-STEP NEGOTIATIONS, INCLUDING BETWEEN JORDAN AND ISRAEL ON THE WEST BANK, OFFERED THE GREATEST HOPE OF SUCCESS AT THE PRESENT TIME."

23. THEN IT WENT ON, AFTER A SIGNIFICANT "BUT": "OUR OBJECTIVE HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO HELP BRING ABOUT AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT...NOT A SEPARATE SETTLEMENT OR SETTLEMENTS. THE ONLY QUESTION HAS BEEN HOW BEST TO PROCEED IN ORDER TO REACH THIS OBJECTIVE...WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK THE ANSWER..."

24. THE SUM TOTAL, AS ONE OFFICIAL PRIVATELY ADMITTED AFTER THE STATEMENT WAS BELATEDLY RELEASED YESTERDAY AFTERNOON AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT, IS "CERTAINLY AMBIGUOUS." OTHER OFFICIALS WHO HAVE DEALT AT THE WORKING LEVEL FOR YEARS WITH PALESTINIANS AND WITH THE PROBLEM OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM WERE PRIVATELY CHEERED.

25. THE ONLY OBVIOUS RESULT SO FAR, AS PLO LEADER AND

SOMETIME TERRORIST ARAFAT DECLARED AT RABAT, IS THAT A
"HISTORIC TURNING POINT" HAS INDEED BEEN ACHIEVED AT THE
MOROCCO SUMMIT, AND THAT THE UNITED STATES IS ALREADY
BEGINNING TO ADJUST TO A 'NEW REALITY.'" END TEXT. INGERSOLL

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